

Certification of Examination of Thesis

We, the following members of the Thesis Examination Panel appointed by the Senate to examine the thesis entitled:-

"Traditional Melanau Woodcarving (Bilum) in Dalat, Sarawak"

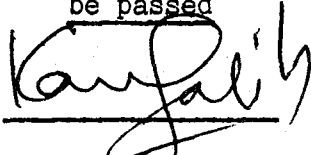
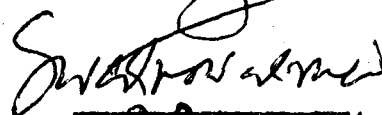
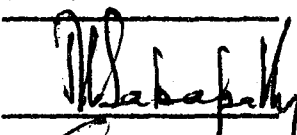

submitted by Encik Chong Chin Seng in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts hereby confirm that:-

- (i) We met on Friday, 15 January 1982 and submitted the candidate, Encik Chong Chin Seng to an Oral Examination in accordance with the Provisions of Part (A) Clause 8(3) of the Higher Degree Programme Requirements:-

"Unless exempted by Senate, a candidate will have to appear for an Oral Examination"

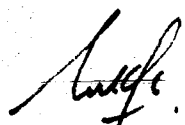
and

- (ii) that we make the following individual recommendations:-

<u>Thesis Examination Panel</u>	<u>The Candidate be passed</u>	<u>The Candidate be not passed</u>
1. Profesor Kamal Salih (Chairman)		
2. Y.B. Datuk Profesor Madya Haji Shahnnon Ahmad Dean, School of Humanities		
3. Encik T.K. Sabapathy Internal Examiner/Co-supervisor		
4. Encik Lim Eng Hooi Additional Internal Examiner		

I, Noel Alfred Ogle, in my capacity as Secretary to the said Thesis Examination Panel, do hereby confirm that the Panel after full consideration of the recommendations of the External and Internal Examiners and of the individual recommendations of its members, has agreed to recommend to the Board of Postgraduate Studies and thereon to Senate that the candidate, Encik Chong Chin Seng be awarded the degree of Master of Arts.

Date: 15 Jan. 1982


(Secretary)

TRADITIONAL MELANAU WOODCARVING
(BILUM) IN DALAT, SARAWAK

by
CHONG CHIN SENG

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

University Sains Malaysia

1982

To the Melanau of Dalat, Sarawak



A collection of traditional bilum, originating from Dalat, displayed in the Sarawak Museum

Explanatory note

See Chapter II (a)

- (i) Bilum (underlined) denotes traditional Melanau woodcarving in Dalat, Sarawak.
- (ii) 'bilum' (within inverted commas) denotes evil spirits as understood by the Melanau in Dalat, Sarawak.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would not have been possible without the hospitality, warmth and co-operation of the people of Dalat District, especially the villagers of Kampong Sungai Ud, Kampong Medong, Kampong Kakan, Kampong Tanam and Kampong Baru Dalat. I truly hope I have lived up to their faith and trust in attempting to draw a better understanding of their traditional craft and their way of life which is fast changing and fading.

I shall not forget the delightful boat-journeys back and forth from Sibü to Dalat and the boat-trips to visit and interview the woodcarvers in the kampongs. My thanks go to Mr. Thomas Tudin, the Education Officer in Dalat and Mr. Hamdan bin Baijuri, headmaster of a local government primary school. They served as interpreters and information officers during my visit to Dalat. I would like to thank Tuan Ismail bin Tuan Muhammad,, the Chief Education Officer in Sarawak and Mr. Matnor bin Daim, the Divisional Education Officer in the Third Division for their assistance in arranging transportation facilities from Kuching to Sibü and from Sibü to Dalat. Many thanks go to Mr. Peter Nyaed Juses,

the District Officer and Mr. Peter Ding Hing Sung, the Assistant District Officer. They were most generous with their time and assistance during my stay in Dalat. I thank Mr. Lucas Chin, Curator of the Sarawak Museum, for the personal interest he took in my work and the freedom he allowed me in the use of his library.

In Penang, I owe my sincere gratitude to Mr. T.K. Sabapathy and Mr. Zakaria Ali, my supervisors, for their assistance, guidance, encouragement and patience in the preparation of my thesis. I am most grateful to Mr. V.P. Mohan and Mr. Tan Lye Hoe who spent time in editing the manuscript. This thesis was written between December, 1978 and December, 1981. This undertaking has not only given me a deeper insight into and understanding of the culture of the Melanau people in Sarawak but also sharpened my knowledge of the traditional Melanau woodcarving (bilum).

Finally, I thank all those good people, too numerous to mention, who have helped me in one way or another with the typing and the completion of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgement	ii
List of Maps	vi
List of Tables	vii
List of Plates	viii
Ringkasan tesis	xi
Abstract	xiv
Chapter I : Introduction	1
Chapter II : Dalat as a Resource Centre for Studying the Traditional Melanau <u>Bilum</u>	21
(a) The Definition of <u>Bilum</u>	25
Chapter III : Sickness Healing	27
(a) Simple Healing	30
(b) Bayoh	34
(c) Anyin	39
(d) Rabong	43
Chapter IV : Method of Carving the Tradi- tional Melanau <u>Bilum</u>	50
Chapter V : <u>Bilum</u> Woodcarvers and Weavers in Dalat	61
Chapter VI : Classification and Identifica- tion of the Traditional Melanau <u>Bilum</u> in Dalat	72
(a) Identification of the <u>Bilum</u> according to the Place of Dwelling	

	<u>Page</u>
(b) Identification of the <u>Bilum</u> according to its Generic Origins	78
(c) Identification of the <u>Bilum</u> by Sex	83
Chapter VII : Conclusion	84
(a) Is the Traditional Melanau Woodcarving (<u>bilum</u>) a work of art?	84
(b) The Possible Origin of Melanau <u>Bilum</u>	90
(c) The Traditional Melanau Art Form - <u>Bilum</u>	101
(d) <u>Bilum</u> and Melanau Society	148
Notes	159
Bibliography	165

LIST OF MAPS

	<u>Page</u>
1. Map of Borneo	xvii
2. Map of Sarawak	xviii
3. Map of Dalat District	23

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
1. List of Woodcarvers/Weavers interviewed in Dalat District, 1978	70
2. List of known Woodcarvers and Weavers in Dalat, 1978	71
3. List of the known Traditional Melanau <u>Bilum</u> in Dalat, 1978	153

LIST OF PLATES

	<u>Page</u>
1. The sago processing plant in Dalat.	9
2. The Melanau house in Dalat.	9
3. The Chinese bazaar in Kampong Dalat.	13
4. The sararang pole planted at the boundary between Kampong Medong and Kampong Dalat.	13
5. The Blisieng pole erected at Kampong Dalat.	15
6. The Jerunai (totem pole) erected at Kampong Dalat.	19
7. Bilum Abun Langit - showing the stains of betul-nut juice on its wings and tail.	31
8. Bilum Abun Langit - showing the tail coiling up over its back.	31
9. Rabong Langit Spara.	49
10. Various steps in carving the traditional Melanau <u>Bilum</u> .	53
11. Woodcarver, Bul b. Resa shaping the sago pitch.	54
12. Woodcarver, Bul b. Resa makes an incision on the sago pitch.	54
13. Carving the <u>bilum</u> from the legs upwards.	55
14. The basic shape of the legs is completed.	55
15. Carving the headgear.	56
16. The headgear of the <u>bilum</u> is completed.	56
17. Woodcarver, Bul b. Resa and his completed <u>bilum</u> - 'Jin Sparangin Langit'	57

	<u>Page</u>
18. Woodcarver, Ada b. Terunyok - Kampong Sungai Ud.	66
19. Woodcarver, Udol b. Terunyok - Kampong Sungai Ud.	67
20. Woodcarver, Bul b. Resa - Kampong Medong.	67
21. Woodcarver, Tudin b. Pidan - Kampong Baru Dalat.	68
22. Woodcarver, Sawi b. Pidan - Sungai Ud.	68
23. Woodcarver, Sawi b. Pidan at work.	69
24. Woodcarver, Ada b. Terunyok at work.	69
25. Wooden figure - head with post- Neolithic burial at Magala Cave, Nial.	92
26. Bone carving.	93
27. Wooden Korwar.	103
28. Blangan Guun - Sarawak Museum (64/284)	104
29. Sebulang Langit A, 1978	121
30. Sebulang Langit B - Sarawak Museum (64/164)	122
31. Sayag Semalaryang A - Sarawak Museum (64/170)	123
32. Sayag Semalaryang B - Penang Museum(1978)	101
33. Dalong Sian A - Sarawak Museum (64/260)	125
34. Dalong Sian B - Penang Museum (1978)	126
35. Dalong Tugan A - Sarawak Museum (64/168)	127
36. Dalong Tugan B - Sarawak Museum (64/289)	128
37. Dalong Sekalih - Penang Museum (1978)	129

		<u>Page</u>
38.	Prenakan - Sarawak Museum (64/282)	130
39.	Durig Buau Tou A - Sarawak Museum (64/263)	131
40.	Durig Buau Tou B - Sarawak Museum (64/277)	132
41.	Kulum Pengamo A - Sarawak Museum (64/285)	133
42.	Kulum Pengamo B - Penang Museum (1978)	134
43.	Jin Sparangin Langit Spara A - Sarawak Museum (64/268)	135
44.	Jin Sparangin Langit Spara B - Penang Museum (1978)	136
45.	Jin Sparangin Langit Spara C	137
46.	Jin Buta Paie A - Sarawak Museum (64/276)	138
47.	Jin Buta Paie B (Indigenous Woodcarving of Malaysia Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, 1976)	139
48.	Jin Buta Paie C	140
49.	Naga Sabalun - Sarawak Museum (64/166)	141
50.	Abun Langit	142
51.	Badi - Sarawak Museum (64/287)	143
52.	Naga Penganan - Sarawak Museum (65/381)	144

Ringkasan Tesis

Maksud tesis ini ialah menganalisa, menyusun dan mentafsirkan ukiran-ukiran kayu (bilum) tradisional suku Melanau di Dalat dalam konteks budayanya dengan menggunakan teknik ilmu bentukkata (morfologi), kegayaan (style) serta penganalisaan analitikal, dan di mana yang boleh, digunakan pentafsiran ikonografi. Dalam menjalankannya, saya telah sertakan fakta-fakta anthropologi dan sejarah. Walaupun tradisi membuat bilum telahpun diketahui oleh para penyelidik sejak keakhiran kurun kesembilanbelas, namun belum lagi wujud satu usaha sistematis yang menggabungkan sumber bahan-bahan sejarah, bahan-bahan muzium, dokumentasi yang ada serta 'field-work', bagi menjadikannya satu-satu kajian yang komprehensif. Pada tesis ini, saya adalah berpandukan pandangan ini.

Tesis ini terdiri daripada 7 bab, termasuk 52 keping gambar, 3 rajah serta 3 peta. Bab pertama melibatkan kajian latarbelakang budaya suku-suku kaum di Sarawak; gunanya untuk mendapat pengertian tentang kemungkinan terdapatnya difusi atau penyebaran budaya di antara masyarakat pribumi serta asal-usul mereka

dan penekanan khas diberi ke atas Melanau di Dalat dalam konteksnya sendiri terhadap susunan ekonomi, politik dan sosial mereka. Bab kedua menerangkan kenapa Dalat telah terpilih menjadi sumber dalam mengkaji bilum Melanau; dalam hal ini lima buah kampung: Kampung Sungai Ud, Kampung Medong, Kampung Tanam, Kampung Kakan dan Kampung Baru Dalat menjadi rujukan. Bab ini juga menerangkan definisi 'bilum' yang mempunyai dua makna: (i) pertamanya, ertinya ialah ukiran imej-imej yang berhubung dengan penyakit yang lazimnya dipanggil bilum, (ii) mengikut mitologi Melanau, panggilan istilah 'bilum' kadang-kadangnya digunakan untuk mengisahkan semangat puaka yang diam pada pokok-pokok, sungai, hutan, bukit-bukau, kubur dan langit. Bab ketiga menyentuh tentang kaedah dan cara-cara mengubati penyakit di dalam masyarakat Melanau. Bab keempat menceritakan kaedah ukiran bilum tradisional Melanau. Bab kelima memperkatakan peranan pengukir-pengukir di Dalat. Bab keenam menyentuh tentang kaedah mengenali dan menggolongkan berbagai bilum yang ada berdasarkan tempat kediamannya atau asal-usul umumnya (generic origins). Bagi setiap kumpulan, satu penerangan ringkas diberi tentang

bentuknya pula. Bab terakhir cuba menghuraikan suatu diskusi beranalisa tentang perkara-perkara yang bilum boleh dianggap sebagai objek seni, asal-usul bilum dan penilaian bentuk seni tradisi Melanau - bilum. Di samping menghuraikan sistem nilai berubah dalam masyarakat Melanau ini, akibat kurangnya penggunaan bilum untuk mengubati penyakit oleh sebab kesannya perubahan sosial dan ekonomi yang pesat dalam masyarakat Melanau juga dikemukakan.

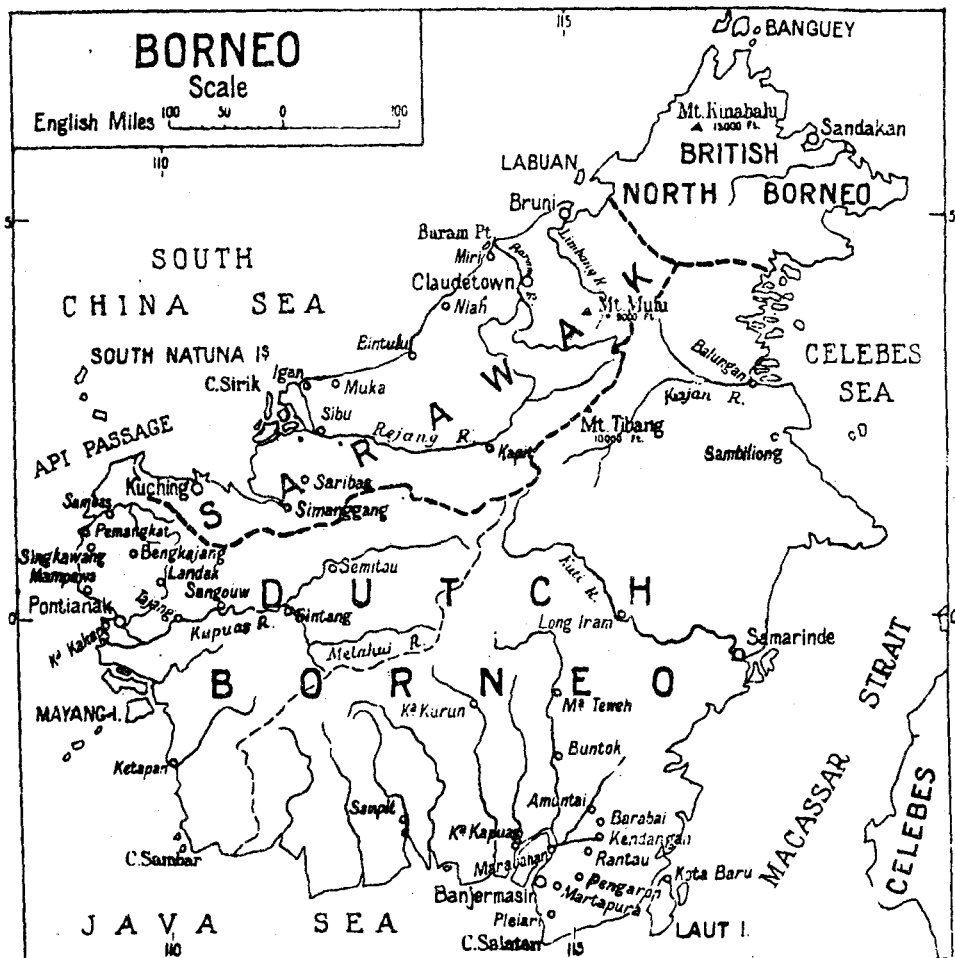
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse, classify and interpret the traditional woodcarving (bilum) of the Melanau in Dalat in its cultural context by using morphological, stylistic and analytical techniques and, when possible, iconographic interpretation. In doing so, I have included anthropological and historical data. Although the tradition of bilum-making has been known to researchers since the late nineteenth century, there has never been a systematic attempt to combine historical sources, museum specimens, existing documentation and field-work, to constitute a single and comprehensive study. In this thesis, I have been guided by this view.

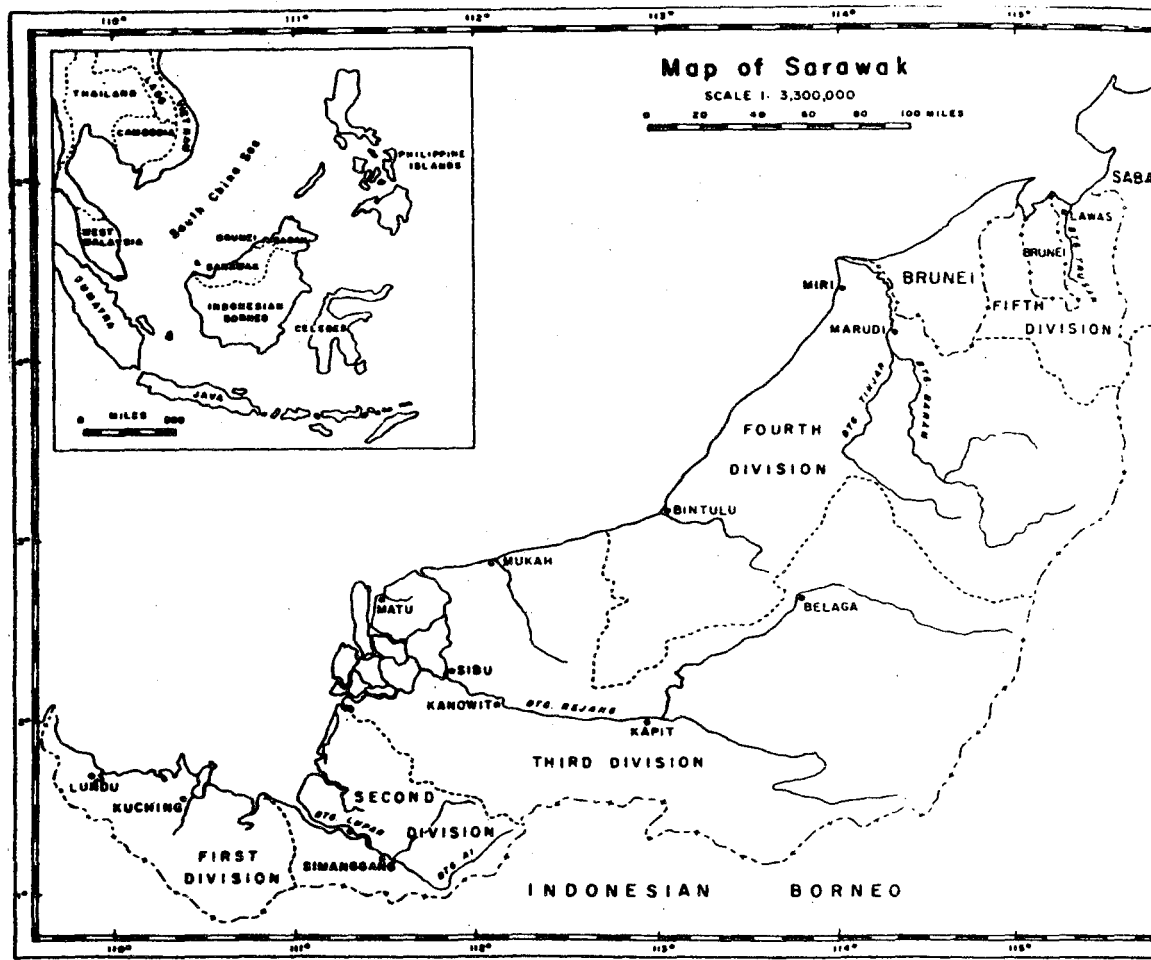
This thesis consists of 7 chapters, including 52 plates, 3 tables and 3 maps. The first chapter is devoted to the study of the cultural background of the different ethnic groups in Sarawak to gain an insight into the possibility of cultural diffusion among the indigenous people and their origins, with emphasis on the Melanau society in Dalat in relation to its own

context on the economic, political and social organisation. The second chapter explains why Dalat was chosen as a resource centre for studying the traditional Melanau bilum with special reference to five villages, namely: Kampong Sungai Ud, Kampong Medong, Kampong Tanam, Kampong Kakan and Kampong Baru Dalat. It also clarifies the definition of the 'bilum' which has a double meaning: (i) it refers to the carvings of sickness images which are commonly known as bilum in Dalat: (ii) according to Melanau mythology, the term 'bilum' is sometimes used to describe the evil spirits which dwell in trees, rivers, forests, hills, graveyards and the sky. The third chapter touches on the various procedures and methods of sickness healing in the Melanau community. The fourth chapter describes the method of carving of the traditional Melanau bilum. The fifth chapter deals with the role of the woodcarvers in Dalat. The sixth chapter deals with the method of identification and classification of the various bilum according to its place of dwelling or generic origins. For each a brief description of the form is given. The concluding chapter enters into an analyti-

cal discussion on matters such as whether the bilum can be considered as an art object; the possible origin of the bilum and the appraisal of the tradition Melanau art from - bilum. In addition, an explanation of the changing value system in the Melanau society resulting in the diminishing use of the bilum in sickness healing, owing to the impact of rapid economic and social change in the Melanau community, is also given.



1. Map of Borneo



2. Map of Sarawak

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sarawak, one of the two states of East Malaysia, lies in the tropical rain-forest island of Borneo where the vegetation is thick and dense. The abundance of carvings on wood in preference to carvings on other materials can, therefore, be explained. Wood is plentiful and available everywhere. Stone or iron suitable for carvings is less available. In keeping with social and economic values, woodcarvings serve to increase people's confidence in agriculture and security against sickness. Woodcarvings are part and parcel of their cultural heritage. This is indirectly expressed through the use of wooden images portraying the religious concept of their lives pertaining to their social order. Therefore, the study of the Sarawak physical environment and also the cultural and historical context of the indigenous people in Sarawak

will help to explain the richness of Sarawak wood-carvings and the significance of the use of woodcarving in the everyday life of the indigenous people of Sarawak.

From artifacts such as stone axes and adzes dug up in the Niah Caves, archaeologists conclude that Sarawak was inhabited during the Stone Age; but we are not certain whether the present inhabitants are descendants of those stone-age men. There is greater general agreement that the people living in Sarawak at present came from other parts of Asia especially from Kalimantan. Melanau, Iban, Kenyah Kayan and Bidayu are the four major migration groups. However, the most significant migration occurred after the late 18th century.¹ Probably, many of the Iban entered the headwaters of the Pupar, Skarang and Saribas after 1750. It is believed that Iban communities had been established on the Rejang in 1850, and some moved into the head-waters of the Mukah, Oya and Bintulu rivers by 1870. By 1890 they had moved north along the coast. Now they are the major group in Sarawak.

According to a Kenyah chief on the Baram,² Kenyah people were the first to enter Sarawak from Kalimantan. They were then followed by the Kayan in the 18th and early 19th centuries.³ The Kenyah and Kayan people entered the headwaters of the Kayan and Mahakam rivers and proceeded west into Sarawak over the Ivan and Apo Duat ranges into the headwaters of the Rejang and Baram rivers.

The Bidayu probably began to migrate to Sarawak from Kalimantan in the late 17th century. A large number of Bidayu entered Sarawak during the 19th century because of pressure from the Chinese settlers and the Malay pirates in Kalimantan.⁴

It is believed that the Kelabit people were already living on the banks of the Labid River when the Kenyah and Kayan first arrived on the Baram. The Murut who lived north of the Kelabit might have preceded the Kenyah and Kayan in Sarawak. The indigenous peoples⁵ in Sarawak are similar in physical appearance. They are slim and broad-shouldered. They have either straight or wavy hair. They have smooth brown skin, full lips, strong cheek bones, short noses and dark or black eyes. The Melanau, Iban and Bidayu are darker in complexion than the Kayan and Kenyah but the upriver Melanau are fairer. Normally they can be identified by their language, tatoos and attire.

The present distribution and composition of the indigenous population of Sarawak is the result of more recent migration of the Iban, Bidayu, Kayan and Kenyah from Kalimantan. They entered Sarawak during the last four hundred years. The need to find virgin soil for shifting cultivation and the frequent occurrence of epidemics or other calamities such as wars with the neighbouring groups forced migration upon the native tribes.

Most of the indigenous peoples do subsistence farming. In addition, they collect jungle produce like cane, wood, engkabong (gum) and bird's nest. These are sometimes exchanged for beads, Chinese jars, Brunei brass cannon, gong and even buffaloes with the coastal traders. Such material possessions reflect the wealth and social standing of an individual. Material things become useful for the purpose of dowries, settlement of fines for breaches of native custom or for 'blood-money' - payment to buy freedom from slavery.⁶

The life of the indigenous people does not revolve round a money-economy. Money plays a very

negligible part in their daily lives and generally daily transactions do not involve the payment of cash. Every one who stays in the longhouse can turn to other members of the community for assistance in times of difficulty. Besides salt and iron, most of the things in daily use could be made by the people themselves. For instance, the making of mats, woodcarvings and weaving of cloth are carried on during the off season after the harvest or leisure hours in the longhouse. In addition to playing an active role in domestic affairs, women involve themselves actively in the work on the fields.

Rubber trade is in the hands of the Chinese. Most of the rubber produced is of low quality. The production of pepper is also largely a Chinese industry. Sago is one of the important products of Sarawak too. The Melanau are famous for their sago industry.

Legends of heroes with supernatural powers are common in folklore of the indigenous peoples in Sarawak. These are largely transmitted by word or mouth. These heroes are not represented in any

visual form and they are not worshipped. Practically all the indigenous groups held on to the traditional beliefs before the advent of Christianity to Sarawak. The Islamic influence has been there for many centuries. There are a considerable number of Malays living near the coastal area. Nowadays, Many Melanau have been converted to Islam. With the establishment of British control many Iban, Bidayu, Kenyah and Kayan have become Christians.

However, some aspects of traditional customs still remain as an important cultural component among the various groups. For example, in the event of marriage, death, sickness and religious festivals, woodcarvings are commonly used as a medium in the performance of the ceremonies. The ceremonies originate from the belief in the existence of soul and spirits in the natural world. These groups believe in the existence of super-natural powers around them⁷. Each group has a god which has a function. The function is explained and animated by means of myths. The Supreme God among the groups has different names⁸.

No historical record of the Melanau area existed

prior to 1840. It is believed that the Melanau originally migrated from Java and Sumatra.⁹ The word 'Melanau' appears on the western coast of Sarawak on 16th century Portuguese maps.¹⁰ The Melanau people call themselves 'Liko', meaning Melanau in general. Both Melanau men and women are stockier and more broad-shouldered than the average Malay. Generally, the Melanau have been deeply influenced by Malay customs and culture. However, those from Dalat are not as deeply affected by such cultural influences.

According to Melanau legend,¹¹ over five hundred years ago, before the coming of Islam, the Melanau were ruled by their chiefs. Tugan was the chief who dwelt in the Retus, a tributary of the Igan River, and the chiefs of Oya and Muka were his relatives. At first he challenged the might of Brunei but he was defeated by the Sultan of Brunei. Consequently, Dalat came under the rule of the Sultanate of Brunei, and had to pay annual tribute (sago) to the Sultanate.

But historically, in 1841 during the reign of James Brooke in Kuching, the Dalat District was

still subject to the control of the Sultanate of Brunei because there was a Brunei-Malay governor (pangeran) stationed near the mouth of the rivers Oya and Igan. However, the degree of this control cannot be ascertained. For the past fifty years the Moslem pangeran intermarried with the Melanau and adopted the Melanau language.

Rajah Brooke managed to acquire the whole Melanau District in August, 1861. Then the political system changed and Dalat was placed under the administration of a British Resident stationed at Dalat; he was assisted by local officers in the maintenance of law and order. These officers were members of the former ruling pangeran's family, so that some continuity of political control was maintained. But the new administration created a new system of paid village headman (Tua Kampong).

The official language in Dalat is Malay written in the Jawi script. Under the reign of Brooke, Chinese immigrants began to flow into Dalat quickly. Most of them were businessmen, but the administrative policies made it difficult for the Chinese to acquire titles for land. They lived mainly in the



Plate 1. The sago processing plant in Dalat



Plate 2. The Melanau house in Dalat.

bazaar. In the first decade of the twentieth century a Roman Catholic school and mission was established at Dalat on the Oya River. Soon rubber was introduced as a commercial crop but sago still remains the main crop in Dalat. During the last seventy-five years there has been a rapid increase in the number of Moslems among the Melanau. In 1928 slavery was officially abolished. In 1946 the administrative documents of Sarawak were written in Romanised Malay. In 1963, with the establishment of Malaysia, the administration of Sarawak came under the Malaysian Government. Under the new economic policy, there has been significant economic and social changes in Dalat, such as the new education system, urbanization and setting up of industries in rural areas. This has led to the increased social mobility and change in the Melanau view of the outside world.

In the past the Melanau practised a system of rank that is called 'bangsa'. In Melanau society social position is determined by inherited rank. In official terms, position based on rank has disappeared, but in actual practice Melanau society still continues to accord a certain amount of significance to rank.

Nowadays rank enjoys no economic or political significance. Those with rank, however, are accorded their proper place in their society as a matter of social etiquette and respect. The values and usages of Melanau society reflect Malay influence.¹² The council of the elders, called the 'nyat' was established to cater to the social and political needs of the Melanau. It was this council of the elders which attended to matters pertaining to all problems within each group. During wars these members will act as military leaders.¹³ Since the rule of James Brooke in 1861, European officials appointed as Residents were assisted by the appointed village headmen (Tua Kampong). Normally, the 'Tua Kampong' was the Malay relative of the native officers or local Malay traders. They would act above the 'Nyat' to settle disputes or collect taxes. They served as middle-men between the natives and the Government. The political system has since changed. The power of jurisdiction in matters relating to 'adat' or civil disputes is given to the Native Courts and District Officers. The new mode of political organization and executive functions has been in operation

since 24th March, 1973. Under the new system all appointed officers are paid a fixed monthly salary with an annual increment. The conditions of service are similar to that of other government servants. The District Officer has full powers to recommend any villager to hold office as 'Temenggong', 'Pemanca' or 'Penghulu'.

Taboos play a significant part in the everyday life of the Melanau. The social and economic activities are largely controlled by a great range of taboos. There are general taboos, hereditary taboos and taboos¹⁴ relating to medicine. Melanau taboos vary from village to village. These concern fishing, pregnancy, child-birth, animal-traps, fish-traps, sailing, cock-fighting, grave-digging, death-rites, sago-felling, honey-collecting, post-marriage rites, rice-planting, mourning for a child, tree-felling for making boats and tuba-poisoning.

'Kaul' is the only festival in Dalat District. It involves three villages, namely: Kampong Medong, Kampong Dalat and Kampong Oya. It is undertaken in order to feed and appease the spirits so as to drive out sickness and misfortune from the village for the



Plate 3. The Chinese bazaar in Kampong Dalat



Plate 4. The sasarang pole planted at the boundary between Kampong Medong and Kampong Dalat

good of the whole Melanau community.

In the ceremony of 'Kaul' a large wooden pole called 'blisieng' is used. It is believed that two bilum, a male and a female, are kept inside the 'blisieng', to which a big basket is attached; items like cakes, eggs, chicken, bunga teliput (Lotus flower), daun sireh (beetle leaves), kapor and pinang (lime and beetle-nut), cigarettes and matches are placed inside the basket. Symbolically, these items serve as tokens to the spirits. Normally, two 'sararang' poles are used to mark the limits to which the spirits will be moved. For example, one 'sararang' pole is planted half a mile down the River Oya. Consequently, there is one 'sararang' pole planted in Kampong Dalat and one in Kampong Oya (in the sea). This signifies that the evil spirits have eventually been driven into the sea. The ceremony for each village must be carried out in the following months:

Ceremony of 'Kaul'

<u>Village</u>	<u>Month</u>
1. Kampong Medong	January
2. Kampong Dalat	February
3. Kampong Oya	March

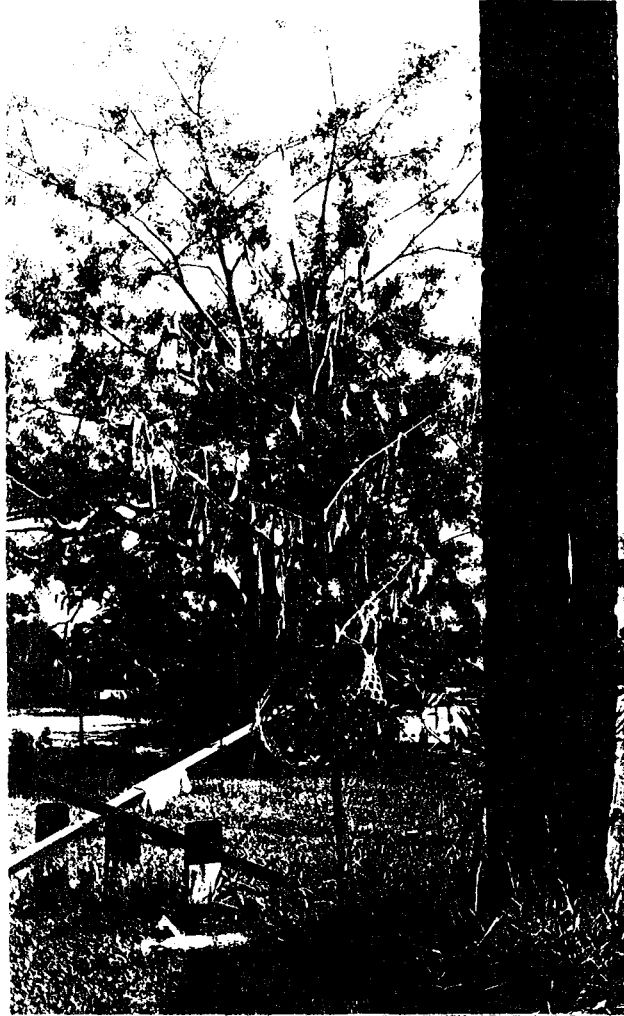


Plate 5. The blisieng pole erected at Kampong Dalat

Every family in the village takes part in this ceremony. Usually there are dances by the boys, dressed in old clothes and wooden masks to imitate the evil spirits which they hope to drive away. A feast for all the villagers is given on the day of the ceremony.¹⁵ However, prayers for prosperity, peace and fertility can only be offered by the Melanau elders either in the open field or in the house. The prayers are always in the Melanau language and go as follows:

'Keman Ipo, keman usai keramai Ipo Ajoh,
Ipo Daya, Ipo Kubau, akau menibah kelau
keramai lau kau menyabah wa dau wa lebih
dau, tou pun kalah. Kau menyabeh umor
lalau, menyabeh jerki murah'

Translation:

'O Spirits! O River Spirit! O Land Spirit!
O Guardian Spirit of the House! I invite all
of you to this special ceremony. I pray for
your blessing and protection. I pray for
your help to defeat the evil spirit. I pray
too for longevity and good fortune'.

Additional rites have to be observed. During the festival no one is allowed to cut down trees. The slaughter of animals or fowls three days after the commencement of the festival is prohibited.

Nowadays, the Melanau bury the dead in the ground.

Traditionally, the burial needed totem poles especially for the royalty and the wealthy. The totem poles were constructed at the time of building a house and were erected in front of the house. Usually, the poles were made of belian wood, about 40 to 50 feet high. The poles took two forms: one was carved and called 'Kelideng', while the other was the 'Jerunei' and was plain. They were used for the leader in the community only. The carvings are symbolic representations of the concept of 'antu' (spirit). The totem poles are similar to those found in the Kalimantan region erected by the Kenyah and Kayan people.

The 'Kelideng' is cylindrical in shape and is hollowed out to serve as a coffin large enough for a body. If the erection of the pole is difficult, manpower is drawn from the whole village. In such cases a slave was sacrificed for the master. In normal practice, after the burial of the dead, an activity called 'Puip' (cock-fighting) is carried out in the house of the deceased. Usually it takes place about two months after the death of a person. The relatives of the dead will invite the whole

kampong (village) for the 'Puip' which usually lasts 2 or 3 days. The villagers in the kampong would start to buy good birds to prepare for the cock-fighting. If a cock is killed during the 'Puip' its spirit is offered to the dead as appeasement. Any time, after a three-day mourning period, a ceremony called 'Pelato' is held. In this ceremony the medium serves as an agent to communicate with the dead.

The Melanau believe that there are two worlds; one is the present world where there is plenty of food and material wealth. The other is the after-world¹⁶ which is full of food and material wealth too. These two worlds are separated by the River of the Dead which is guarded at the mouth by an old but beautiful woman called 'Balu Adad'¹⁷ who owns two fierce dogs. The dead have to appease the dogs with packets of rice in order to continue their journey. The dead must wait for 'Balu Adad' to take them to the proper place in the after-world.

The River of the Dead has a few tributaries to accommodate those who died in unusual circumstances, such as women who died during childbirth or warriors

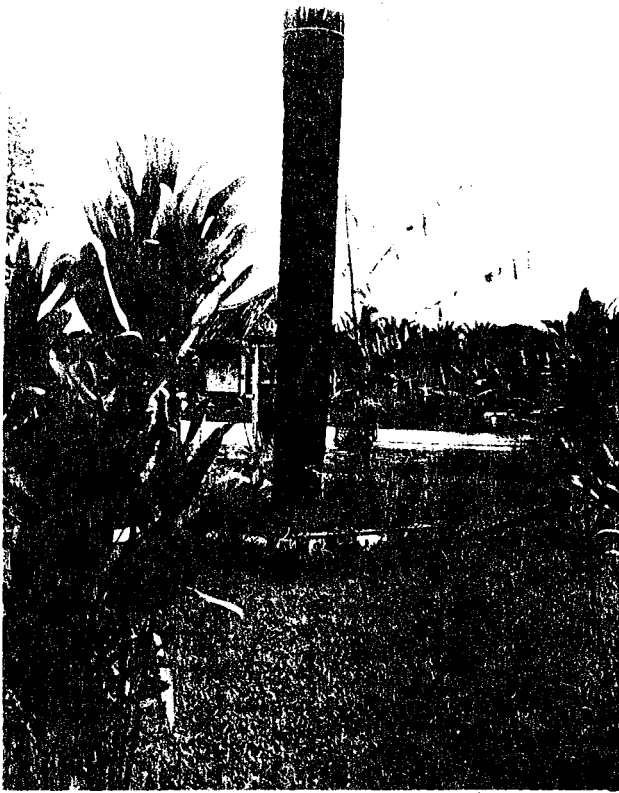


Plate 6. The 'Jerunai' (totem pole) erected at
Kampong Dalat

who were killed in wars or anyone who died a violent death. These people will not be able to go to the proper after-world but will remain in the tributaries where the water is believed to be red in colour.

This conception of the after-world is reflected in the Melanau burial custom of using a canoe-shaped coffin for the corpse, signifying that the dead is travelling to the after-world by boat on the River of the Dead. The totem pole is reserved to commemorate the great leaders of the Melanau society. Also there is a custom whereby the personal belongings of the deceased are packed in a suitcase along with valuable materials such as gold, brass and china or porcelain in the coffin obviously for use in the after-world.

CHAPTER II

DALAT AS A RESOURCE CENTRE FOR STUDYING THE TRADITIONAL MELANAU BILUM

The choice of Dalat as a resource centre for studying the traditional Melanau bilum is not accidental. There are several factors which have contributed to it.

There are two types of Melanau bilum in existence in Sarawak to-day of which one is subject to extreme external influence. This type of bilum is found near the sea coast, in Mukah, Mato and Bintulu districts. Sarah Gill in her thesis 'Selected Aspects of Sarawak Art' says that:

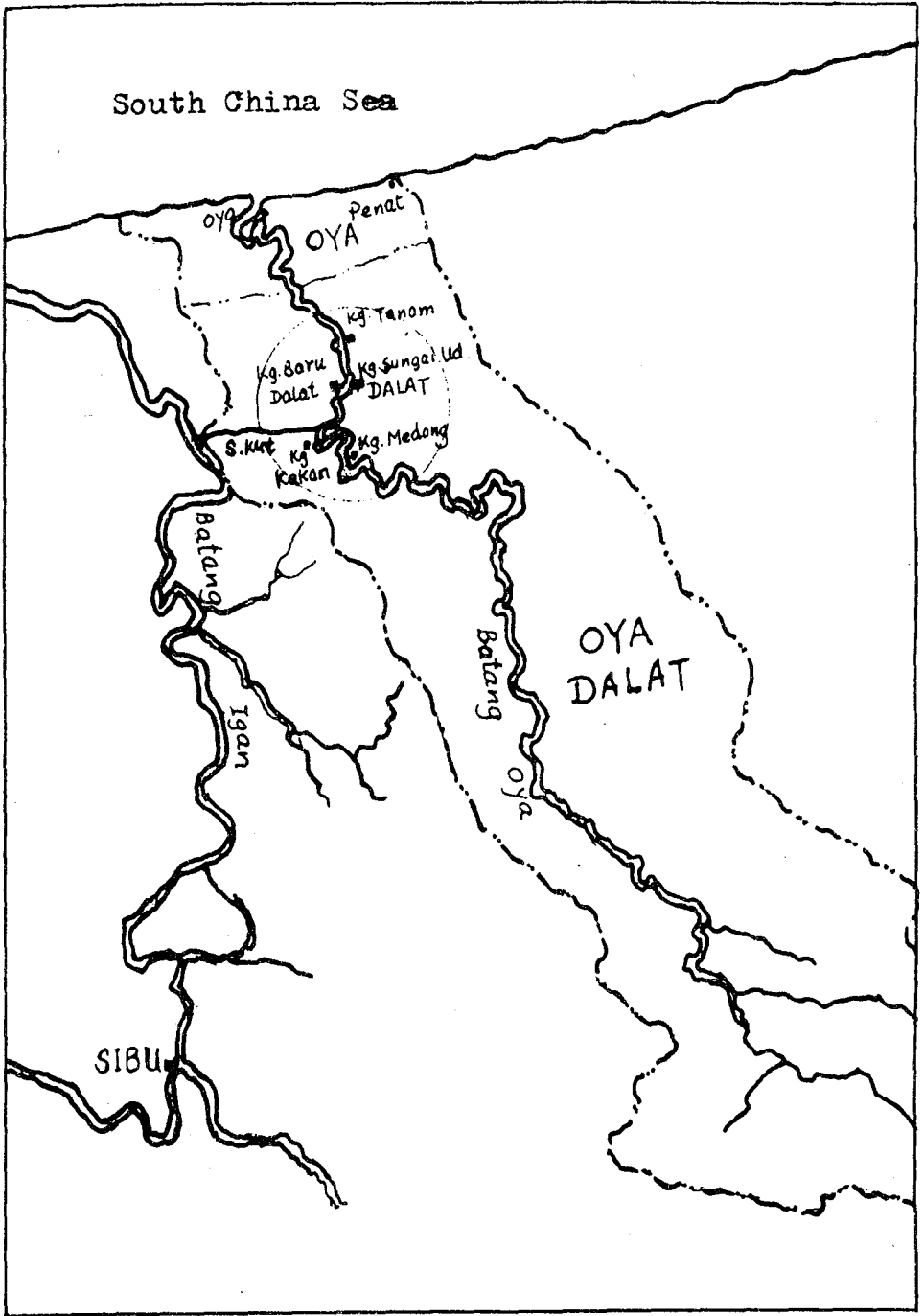
"Mukah is, of course, an area of powerful Malay influence, it was the seat of one of the Malay Governors sent from Brunei. Thus it is not surprising to find here in Melanau art a final capitulation to Malay influence" (p.90).

On the other hand, the other type which is more

traditional can only be found in the Dalat District. Since my research is on the traditional Melanau bilum, Dalat is the obvious choice.

During my first visit to the Sarawak Museum in December, 1976, the research assistant of the Sarawak Museum, Mr. Tuton Kaboy who is of Melanau origin from Bintulu, suggested Dalat as the resource centre for studying the bilum for several reasons which cannot be overlooked by researchers or scholars.

Firstly, the Melanau people who still practise the rituals of sickness healing ceremony nowadays are to be found only in Dalat District. It is a common practice in Dalat to use the bilum symbolically as medicine to cure diseases. Secondly, there are still a number of part-time woodcarvers living in the Dalat District, especially in Kampong Sungai Ud and Kampong Medong. Thirdly, Dalat District has always functioned as a cultural centre for the Melanau. For example the yearly 'Kaul' festival is celebrated even today. Fourthly, Dalat is the only place where the Melanau are in the majority. The Muslim and Christian Melanau converts do not believe in using the bilum for curing diseases because their



3. Map of Dalat District

religions do not permit them to indulge in such practices. It is found that only the Melanau have become part-time woodcarvers in Dalat District. Fifthly, there exists a considerable amount of literature on the Melanau. Another important factor is that the woodcarvings (bilum), kept in the Sarawak Museum, are largely collected from Dalat District.

In order to facilitate my study, I have selected five villages namely: Kampong Sungai Ud, Kampong Medong, Kampong Kakan, Kampong Tanam and Kampong Baru Dalat; the villages are about one to three miles apart. The Kampong Dalat bazaar is the administrative centre as well as the centre for economic, political, social and cultural activities for all the five villages. The only means of transportation between villages is by boat. To a certain extent, urbanization has affected the life pattern in Dalat District; the sago industry is declining; the younger generation tends to move out of the kampongs and take up jobs in the cities or towns. There is every indication that the practice of the traditional way of sickness curing ceremony will slowly lose ground and ultimately disappear.